

Appendix A - Summary of Public Involvement

The Visitor Facilities Study is a cooperative effort between the National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. Both agencies regularly request public input on agency planning documents, studies, and land management activities. Since April 2003, the National Park Service and Alaska Department of Natural Resources have pursued public involvement and gathered public information.

A newsletter was developed to introduce the purpose of the Visitor Facilities Study, announce the dates and locations of four public open houses, and request public comments. More than 1,200 newsletters were mailed near the end of May. The newsletter was also posted on the Denali National Park and Preserve and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources websites.

The National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources co-hosted four public open houses in June 2003. The project leaders presented background information on the north access issue and explained the purpose of the Visitor Facilities Study. The public had an opportunity to meet the project leaders, ask questions, review maps, discuss issues and provide comments. The open house schedule was as follows:

Monday, June 9 – Noel Wien Public Library, 1215 Cowles Street, Fairbanks
Tuesday, June 10 – Tri-Valley Community Center, Healy Spur Road, Healy
Wednesday, June 11 – Denali Borough Assembly Meeting, Cantwell School, Cantwell
Thursday, June 12 – Loussac Public Library, 3600 Denali Street, Anchorage

In Cantwell, a brief presentation was made during the Denali Borough Assembly Meeting and the open house followed the assembly meeting.

The Visitor Facilities Study and the North Access issue was discussed on the Alaska Public Radio Network's "Talk of Alaska" program that aired June 10, 2003.

Public comments on the Visitor Facilities Study were requested by July 11, 2003. Eighty-five comment letters were received. The National Park Service and Alaska Department of Natural Resources drafted a "Summary of Public Comments" newsletter that was mailed to the 85 commenters and all of the open house attendees. The newsletter was also posted on the Denali National Park and Preserve website.

Summary of Public Comments

While some comments addressed visitor facilities specific to one scenario, other comments were more general. A number of comments were considered to be "outside the scope" of the study, meaning they did not specifically address types of visitor facilities, identify potential locations for visitor facilities, and/or suggest factors or criteria to consider when exploring options for facility locations.

Many commenters had difficulty understanding the purpose and timing of the study. Several individuals recommended completing an analysis on a north access route prior to exploring locations for visitor facilities. A common question was, “Why study visitor facilities along a transportation corridor that does not exist?”

There were also questions raised concerning the definition and use of the phrase “Stampede Road alignment.” This issue is addressed in chapter 1 of this document.

The summary of public comments is organized by three scenarios. The Road Scenario explores ideas for visitor facilities that could be located along a road corridor between Healy and Kantishna, and the Railroad Scenario explores ideas for visitor facilities along a railroad corridor. The Existing Situation Scenario considers visitor facilities that could enhance the existing situation and recreational opportunities that currently occur in the study area.

Within each scenario’s summary of public comments are a few selected quotes from the public letters that pertain specifically to visitor facilities within that scenario. The comments on the three scenarios are followed by a section that summarizes general comments that are not specific to any one scenario. The final section summarizes comments that are considered outside the scope of the study.

Road Scenario

Comments specific to the road scenario varied greatly, from primitive facility development to expanding overnight accommodations in the Wonder Lake area. Excerpts from some of the letters include:

I encourage you to provide access for RV parking and a dump station at the visitors center at the beginning of the Stampede Road. There should be lots of turnouts and overnight parking available in the summer. . . . The public should be allowed to visit Wonder Lake and stay overnight in cabins or a lodge in both summer and winter. There should also be RV parking at Wonder Lake in the summer.

We suggest that facilities be nothing more than is on the other road into the park.

Parking spaces/camping/rest areas should be provided at Savage and or Teklanika Rivers.

I prefer a road with access to campgrounds, lakes, and streams along the way rather than a railroad. Please include several scenic pull-outs along the way with both historic and natural interpretive signs where applicable.

Minimalist approach better; fewer waysides reduces human impact on environment.

If a road is constructed, all development should be on State or private lands.

Railroad Scenario

Among the three scenarios, the railroad scenario received the fewest comments. Also, comments pertaining to a monorail are included in this section. Some of the comments received for this scenario include:

Focus facilities on railroad based access; keep campgrounds of moderate size (maximum of 30 sites each); place campgrounds at beginning, middle, and end of route only; restrooms at all campgrounds needed; place day use loop trails at all campgrounds; vehicle parking only needed at beginning (George Parks Highway area) of route; provide scenic overlooks at beginning.

Whistle stop scenario – trails accessible from rail line.

I believe a two-way low speed electrical monorail (cars departing every 15 minutes) would be the best mode of transportation. . . There would be regular stops along the way for hikers and skiers.

Existing Situation Scenario

Several commenters suggested ways in which the existing situation could be enhanced, such as restrooms, camping (dispersed campsites to developed campgrounds), trails and interpretive opportunities. A few examples of these comments include:

I would agree with plans to add pull-outs and camping spaces to the existing road.

If improving the road and providing campgrounds, trails, etc., can be done without restricting winter or summer motorized access or hunting, then I am all for it.

We would like to see an extended hiking trail system, . . . an improved hiking trail along the Stampede itself to Savage River, . . . small designated backcountry camping areas off the trails with minimum but monitored facilities would be welcome.

If trails are to be constructed, I would give first consideration to some relatively short easy loop trails that are low maintenance. Such trails would emphasize scenery, geology, flora, and fauna but would be designated to have minimal impact on wildlife.

General – Not Specific to One Scenario

Following are examples of comments pertaining to visitor facilities in the study area that are not associated with any scenario or that applied to more than one scenario:

Emphasize loop trails with views.

Primitive trails and campsites only.

Visitor centers – certainly at either end, additionally in between, are highly used. . . . Sufficient camping sites (grouped by use; RV, tent, primitive), a range of hiking trails, restrooms, trash containers, etc. should be considered.

Because the North Addition is winter range, visitor facilities (hence associated road or rail traffic) should not operate in winter. Campgrounds and other tourism facilities that concentrate people and their wastes should not be located within ¼ mile of major rivers.

Positions of campgrounds will have to be on river bars or be on a side road at some elevation to get some breeze to get relief from the bugs. . . . The Sushana is a nice camping place, but the “Bus” is a piece of junk and should be removed.

Other Comments

Many commenters addressed issues that did not pertain to the purpose of the study, which is “to explore options for the location of campgrounds, trails, and other visitor facilities along the Stampede Road alignment.”

Many people commented that they would like to see the area remain as it is today and were opposed to the idea of any new visitor facilities in the study area. Although these comments do not pertain to any of the three scenarios, they are pertinent to the issue and any future proposals regarding a north access route. Since this is a study, however, as opposed to an environmental assessment with a proposed action, it is not necessary or required to include a “no action alternative” or, rather, a “no action scenario,” because the visitor facilities study does not propose any action.

Although the visitor facilities study does not make any recommendations pertaining to a north access transportation corridor, the study is undeniably linked to the broader issue of a new northern access route into Denali National Park and Preserve. Many people voiced their opinions about the north access issue at the public open houses and expressed opinions in their comment letters. Following is a summary of the comments received that pertain specifically to the issue of a north access transportation corridor:

A total of 85 written comments were received. Of those:

- 53 commenters expressed opposition to a new north access into Denali (46 of the 53 expressed a desire to see the area left as it is, while the remaining 7 expressed a desire to see some sort of enhancement or improvement on state land)
- 13 commenters supported a new road
- 5 commenters supported a railway (1 commenter specifically identified a monorail as opposed to a railroad)
- 13 expressed a desire for some sort of enhancement of the existing situation (7 of these clearly expressed opposition to a new north access, while the other 6 did not oppose additional access)
- 8 commenters did not clearly express an opinion one way or the other for a new north access route

Note: The bulleted list totals 92 because 7 commenters are counted twice – once in the group of 53 who oppose north access and again as supporting some sort of enhancement.

Additional concerns raised by commenters included: user fees, private vs. government-operated facilities, vandalism, theft, and law enforcement.

Draft North Access Visitor Facilities Study

The Draft North Access Visitor Facilities Study was released for public comment in April 2004. The National Park Service and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources co-hosted three public open houses in May 2004. The project leaders presented an overview of the draft study and the public had an opportunity to meet the project leaders, ask questions, review maps, discuss issues and provide comments. The open house schedule was as follows:

Monday, May 10 – Loussac Public Library, 3600 Denali Street, Anchorage
Tuesday, May 11 – Tri-Valley Community Center, Healy Spur Road, Healy
Wednesday, May 12 – University Park, 1000 University Avenue, Fairbanks

The deadline for public comments on the draft study was June 15, 2004. Twenty comment letters were received. The comments were reviewed and the study was finalized.

